

3-3-1979

# Three Generations of Italians: Interview with Roland Bellotti by Maureen Sweeney

Roland Bellotti

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**COVER SHEET FOR INTERVIEWS**

**NAME OF INTERVIEWEE** Roland Bellotti

**INTERVIEWER** Maureen Sweeney

**DATE OF INTERVIEW** 3/3/79

**SUBJECTS COVERED**

Parents' background

Emigration

Settlement of family in U.S.

Personal data

Employment

Education

Family life, roles, traditions

Religion

Current family roles, education of his children

Community

INTERVIEW  
ITALIANS IN RHODE ISLAND  
ROLAND BELLOTTI SR.  
SECOND GENERATION ITALIAN

Maureen Sweeney

March 3, 1979

General Studies 363

Dr. Santoro

### Parents Background

Interviewer: What have your parents told you about Italy?

Interviewee: Not too much. My father came from a little town outside of Naples called Vardi Arnez. Their traditions they did over there are a little different than the way they do them here.

Interviewer: Were both your parents from Italy?

Interviewee: No. Just my father was from Italy.

Interviewer: Where was your mother born?

Interviewee: My mother was born in Johnston Rhode Island.

Interviewer: What type of job did your father do in Italy?

Interviewee: When he was in Italy he helped on the farm. He was a student.

Interviewer: Is your mother Italian?

Interviewee: Yes.

### Emigration from Italy

Interviewer: When did your father come to America?

Interviewee: He came in 1907 with his sister.

Interviewer: Why did he leave Italy?

Interviewee: Because of better employment, and to better himself.

Interviewer: How did he get here?

Interviewee: By boat.

Interviewer: Wher was his destination?

Interviewee: Either Johnston or Providence. This is where the Italian emigrants got together.

Interviewer: Did he reach his destination?

Interviewee: Yes.

Interviewer: How did he feel about emigrating?

Interviewee: I imagine he felt good. He never said anything to us when we were children.

Interviewer: Did he feel any emotional or physcial strain from the trip?

Interviewee: He didn't say.

### Early Settlement

#### A) You parents settlement:

Interviewer: Wher did your parents live?

Interviewee: Johnston.

Interviewer: What was the housing situation like for your parents?

Interviewee: They lived with relatives. They all lived in the same house.

Interviewer: Did they ever live on federal hill?

Interviewee: No.

Interviewer: What was the neighborhood like? Was it all

Interviewer: Italian?

Interviewee: All Italians, mostly from Italy.

Interviewer: Was the neighborhood all family?

Interviewee: It was like a family, the same people from the same town in Italy.

Interviewer: Was it a large neighborhood?

Interviewee: Fairly good size.

Interviewer: What were the people like?

Interviewee: All Italian. They carried out the same traditions. They did things they did in Italy.

Interviewer: Did your father tell you anything else about his early settlement?

Interviewee: No.

B.) Yourself

Interviewer: Where were you born?

Interviewee: Providence during the depression.

Interviewer: Did you ever live on Federal Hill after you were born?

Interviewee: No.

Interviewer: Where did you live?

Interviewee: Silver Lake section of Providence.

Interviewer: What was your housing situation like?

Interviewee: Mother father and seven kids. Mother's mother lived downstairs. It was very good and comfortable.

Interviewer: Did any other relatives live in the house with you?

Interviewee: An aunt.

Interviewer: Where did your other relatives live?

Interviewee: In the same neighborhood.

Interviewer: What was the neighborhood like?

Interviewee: Family. All families lived in the neighborhood.

We had grapevines in the yards, to make wine. A lot of houses but not too crowded.

Interviewer: Did you have many friends?

Interviewee: Mostly relatives.

Interviewer: How were you treated as the son of an emigrant?

Interviewee: There was little animosity. Some prejudice because we were Italian.

Interviewer: How did you feel being the son of an Emigrant?

Interviewee: PROUD

Interviewer: What kind of conflicts did you come across when you got older?

Interviewee: Called names, wap, dago, greese ball, names like that.

Interviewer: How did you handle these conflicts?

Interviewee: When we were younger we used to fight, and call them names frenchman frogs. We're all even now.

Interviewer: When you were older did you feel differently about being the son of an emigrant?



Interviewee: About the same. It was a little stronger because of the different thing that happen along the way. You learn different attitudes about people. You more or less learn more.

Interviewer: Did you come across any new conflicts as you grew older an as the years went on?

Interviewee: Not really.

Interviewer: Did you feel any prejudice you being an Italian?

Interviewee: There's always a little prejudice. Like the wives family didn't want her to marry an Italian because of the stories they heard. Italians being tough. Actually the Italians are family men. They feel that the men are stronger in the family and that I might hurt their daughter, which is not true. They know that now.

Interviewer: Were there any other prejudices?

Interviewee: No.

### Employment

#### A) Parents

Interviewer: What type of job did your father do when he came to America?

Interviewee: Weaver at Paragina Worchester Mill in Oneyville.

Interviewer: Did your mother work?

Interviewee: No. She did when she was younger. She was a



Interviewee: child laborer when she was 12 or 13.

Interviewer: When your father found out what she had to do was angry or did he like the idea?

Interviewee: He didn't like the idea.

Interviewer: What type of job did your mother do?

Interviewee: She had to stay home because she had seven children and that was a full time job.

Interviewer: Did your father ever receive any education while he was working?

Interviewee: No.

B) Your employment

Interviewer: At what age did you start working?

Interviewee: 18

Interviewer: Did you have to go to work?

Interviewee: No.

Interviewer: What type of job did you do?

Interviewee: Bakery at A&P.

Interviewer: Were you educated while on the job?

Interviewee: No.

Interviewer: What were your vies of employment?

Interviewee: At that time employment was good. Things were just booming. Job were rather easy to get at that time.

Interviewer: What is your present employment?

Interviewee: I work for the state of Rhode Island.

Interviewer: Is this the job you always wanted?

Interviewee: No.

Interviewer: What is the type of job you've always wanted?

Interviewee: To own my own business. I didn't succeed in it.  
But I still would like to be in my own business.

### Education

#### A) Parents

Interviewer: How much education did your father have when he came to America?

Interviewee: I think he finished school in Italy.

Interviewer: How about your mother how much education did your mother have?

Interviewee: Very little. I don't even think she got out of grammar school. That was it.

Interviewer: Did they ever mention if they wanted more education for themselves?

Interviewee: Not really. Education wasn't one of the things they talked about.

#### B) YOURSELF

Interviewer: How much education did you receive?

Interviewee: I went through the eleventh grade.

Interviewer: Where did you go to school?

Interviewee: Cranston.

Interviewer: Did you learn much in school?

Interviewee: Oh yeah, you always learn a lot. It's the training they give you. You should learn.

Interviewer: Did you speak both languages in school?

Interviewee: Yes. Not fluently, but enough to understand and be understood.

### Family

#### A) Your family life with your parents

Interviewer: What did you value about your family?

Interviewer: Togetherness. Somebody to fall back on. Somebody to talk to, especially when things happen you have to have somebody to relate to. Your family are the people who understand you.

Interviewer: Do you feel you're typically Italian?

Interviewee: Yes.

Interviewer: What was your father's role in the family?

Interviewee: Boss. He made all the decisions. He's the leader. He more or less ran the family the way he saw fit.

Interviewer: What were some of his responsibilities?

Interviewee: He used to love the garden. That was his thing. Do the garden. Make enough stuff to last through the winter. Big families were hard to bring up in those days.

Interviewer: What was your mothers role in the family?

Interviewee: Housekeeper.

Interviewer: What were her responsibilities?

Interviewee: She did the cooking, cleaning. She was more or less predominant. She stood between the father, son, and daughter. She made herself known when she had to do things.

Interviewer: What about the kids in your family? Did they all have specific tasks or responsibilities?

Interviewee: Yes.

Interviewer: What are some of the things you had to do while you were growing up?

Interviewee: Me as the youngest, I had to go to the store and get the coal for the stove. I had to help my father take care of the garden, help make the wine, and certain things he demanded of me.

Interviewer: What were the roles of the other children in the family?

Interviewee: Same.

Interviewer: What language was spoken in the home?

Interviewee: English.

Interviewer: Was there any Italian spoken?

Interviewee: Definitely.

Interviewer: What were some of the traditions your father

Interviewer: brought with him from Italy?

Interviewee: I would say the biggest thing was making wine. He proud of making wine. He considered himself one of the best wine makers. He would make it and give it to my aunts, uncles, and everybody that came over the house. He made enough for the whole year. The whole family would get together and make sauages. They would buy part of a pig. They spent nights justing making sauages. They would hang it in the attic. They did the same thing with egg plant. They made egg plant with vinegar. They did all the things and talked. They got ready for the winter, They didn't do this in the winter.

Interviewer: Were their any family stories passed on?

Interviewee: Ghost stories were a big thing. They used to talk about people running in the fiels. Some woman with long hair, and they used to see her brushing her hair in the fields. Come to find out she was killed in this field and they really believe it. It was a big thing with them.

Interviewer: How was your home decorated?

Interviewee: It was more American.

Interviewer: What food preparations did your mother make?

Interviewee: A lot of American dishes. A lot of Italian dishes.

Interviewee: They used to make a meal out of almost nothing.  
They used to take a bone and make a meal out of the bone. The family got together and made Italian dishes. More Americanism is taking over because of the younger generations.

Interviewer: Do your parents practice the same religion here as in Italy?

Interviewee: Yes. Roman Catholic.

Interviewer: What church did you attend?

Interviewee: Saint Mary's.

Interviewer: Do you still attend the same church?

Interviewee: Yes.

Interviewer: How did you feel about religion when you were younger?

Interviewee: Religion was very strict. The priest's were like kings. They were top of the line. You listened to them and that was it.

Interviewer: How do you feel about religion now?

Interviewee: It's more relaxed. The traditions are broken. You go to church and they talk in english, when they used to talk in latin. Latin was like a mistique. Now that it's in english it doesn't seem to carry the power that it did.

Interviewer: Do you still attend church?



Interviewee: Yes.

B) Your present family with your wife and children.

Interviewer: Is your family still valued as much?

Interviewee: Yes, definitely.

Interviewer: What is your role in the family?

Interviewee: I like to think of myself as the boss.

Interviewer: Do you have any other responsibilities other than being the boss and the breadwinner?

Interviewee: Yeah a lot of responsibilities.

Interviewer: Do you help out in the house?

Interviewee: Oh yeah I cook once in a while.

Interviewer: Do you like to cook a lot of Italian dishes?

Interviewee: Yes. That's why. I like to cook the Italian dishes my mother used to cook, what I can remember. My wife does them.

Interviewer: What is your wife's role in the family?

Interviewee: Almost as equal as mine.

Interviewer: Does she work?

Interviewee: Yes. On and off.

Interviewer: How about your children do they have any special responsibilities expected of them? For example cleaning the house.

Interviewee: Yes. They have to do their share.



Interviewer: What do you feel has changed between your life with your parents, and your present family?

Interviewee: Well it's smaller. It's not like having seven children in the family. Now I only have two children when before there were seven children plus my mother and father. Then my brothers and sisters had kids. It was a lot of people, compared to now. Now I only have a small family. A smaller nucleus. You don't have the same things.

Interviewer: What language is spoken in your family?

Interviewee: Strictly english.

Interviewer: What are some of the traditions you have passed on to your family?

Interviewee: One of the biggest is Christmas Eve. We have fish. It's a tradition that has been going on for years and years in my family. Same thing on Easter.

Interviewer: Are you still close with your relatives?

Interviewee: I'm still close. But not as close because when your mother and father die it seems the family tears apart. Everyone used to go to our mother and fathers house to see them. Everybody used to be there. After they go you don't have that no more.

Interviewer: Do you still live near them?

Interviewee: No. We're spread apart.

Interviewer: What is your house like? Is it Americanized?

Interviewee: Americanized.

Interviewer: What meals are cooked in your house?

Interviewee: A vareity. My wife cooks American, Italian, French, Polish, everything.

Interviewer: Who does the cooking?

Interviewee: My wife.

Interviewer: But do you help out?

Interviewee: Yes.

### Education

#### Your children

Interviewer: How far did you children go in school?

Interviewee: Both graduated high school.

Interviewer: Are you satisfied with their education?

Interviewee: Well I think they should have gone further. They figure they've had enough education and they want to go out into the world and do their own thing.

Interviewer: What is your son doing now?

Interviewee: He is training to be a guard at the A.C.I.

Interviewer: What is your daughter doing now?

Interviewee: She is a waitress.

Community

Interviewer: Where did you grow up?

Interviewee: Silver Lake.

Interviewer: What language was spoken in your community?

Interviewee: A lot of Italian.

Interviewer: Were there any prejudices among your community?

Interviewee: Well it was predominantly Italian so there weren't the kinds of problems of the bigger society.

Interviewer: What traditions are still held in your community?

Interviewee: The Saint Mary's, Saint Rocco's, and the other church feasts. All the religious feasts are carried over to commemorate their saints same as they did in Italy.

Interviewer: How do you feel about politics in your community?

Interviewee: Has politics changed for the Italians over the past years?

Interviewee: Oh definitely. The Italians knew that education had to be the fundamental thing. They more or less built on this from years ago and made sure their children were educated. If a family had the money. The Italians would give money to make sure their children were educated, to where he could step into a job as a lawyer or doctor.

Interviewer: Do you feel the Italians are more involved in politics?

Interviewee: Yes, because they could see it coming. They knew because intelligence is the biggest thing you can ever have when you are in socieity.

Interviewer: How did your community fit in or relate to the larger socieity?

Interviewee: Very good.

Interviewer: Were ther any problems?

Interviewee: No problems.

Interviewee: One last thing I'd like to say at the end of the interview is that as far as Italians go and everything else, when I was a child the Italians only married Italians. Now they've gotten away from that. This is how things and traditions are broken. Italians are marrying French, Irish, and other people. Like myself, I married a french woman. Now we tend to have two traditions in the house. Now we are more or less integrating and that's how we aregetting away from traditions. As I say the old ways are starting to go now. They are weakening. Deep down inside with every generation you will loose a little bit of traditions. My kids are very proud to be Italian. The last thing I was to say is that I grew up through three wars. World War II, The Korean War, And the Vietnām War.

Interviewee: In the war one thing that stuck out in my mind is  
that the Italians were fighting other Italians.